

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUEBEC 00199 091938Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 H-01 INR-10 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 OMB-01
TRSE-00 EB-08 /070 W
-----009714 092012Z /15

P 082145Z JUNE 78
FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1365
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY
AMCONSUL MONTREAL PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, CA
SUBJECT: AMENDMENTS PROPOSED TO REFERENDUM LEGISLATION

1. CONSIDERATION OF BILL 92, THE REFERENDUM BILL, RESUMED THIS WEEK IN PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE UNDER THE DIRECTION OF JUSTICE MINISTER MARC-ANDRE BEDARD, WHO IS SUBSTITUTING FOR THE AILING ROBERT BURNS. LIBERAL OPPOSITION LEADERS JEAN-NOEL LOVOIE AND GERARD-D. LEVESQUE IMMEDIATELY INTRODUCED A SERIES OF AMENDMENTS WHICH WOULD FUNDAMENTALLY ALTER THE BILL, FACILITATING THE PARTICIPATION OF INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS IN THE REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN AND GREATLY REDUCING THE RESTRICTIVE ROLE OF UMBRELLA ORGANIZATIONS.

2. THE AMENDMENTS WOULD HAVE THE EFFECT OF REDUCING THE UMBRELLA COMMITTEE'S ROLE TO NOTHING MORE THAN THE DISTRIBUTION OF THOSE FUNDS WHICH THE GOVERNMENT WILL MAKE AVAILABLE FOR THE CAMPAIGN. INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS WOULD BE PERMITTED TO RAISE FUNDS AND CAMPAIGN ON THEIR OWN WITHOUT ASSOCIATING THEMSELVES WITH AN UMBRELLA COMMITTEE. UNDER BILL 92 AS IT NOW STANDS, GROUPS MUST RPT MUST UNITE T O FORM A SINGLE UMBRELLA COMMITTEE FOR EACH OPTION ON THE RE-
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PAGE 02 QUEBEC 00199 091938Z

FERENDUM WITH CAMPAIGN REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES BEING APPROVED BY THE UMBRELLA COMMITTEE. OPPOSITION GROUPS HAVE DENOUNCED THESE PROVISIONS AS BEING UNNECESSARILY RESTRICTIVE. THE PROVISIONS DO IN FACT STACK THE DECK FOR THE PQ, SINCE THE SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION (OR"YES") FORCES ARE ALREADY UNITED BEHIND THE PQ WHILE THE FEDERALIST

("NO") FORCES ARE FAR LESS HOMOGENEOUS. IN FACT, THE SO-CALLED PRE-REFERENDUM COMMITTEE, WHICH HAS BEEN ORGANIZED TO RALLY THE DISPARATE "NO" FORCES, CONSISTS OF SEVEN POLITICAL PARTIES AND SEVEN PRO-UNITY GROUPS, AND HAS PREDICTABLY BEEN RENT BY BICKERING OVER STRATEGY AND FINANCING.

3. "EACH CITIZEN, GROUP, OR POLITICAL PARTY HAS THE INALIENABLE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE FREELY IN THE REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN," ACCORDING TO LAVOIE. "EACH HAS THE RIGHT TO UNITE WITH WHOEVER HE WISHES, TO DETERMINE BY HIMSELF HIS COURSE OF ACTION, TO SAY WHAT HE WISHES AND TO PARTICIPATE AS HE CHOOSES IN THE CAMPAIGN." THE LIBERAL AMENDMENTS IS DESIGNED TO "ELIMINATE THE COERCIVE AND OBLIGATORY ELEMENTS" OF BILL 92. IN ADDITION TO THESE AMENDMENTS, LAVOIE ALSO INTRODUCED LANGUAGE WHICH WOULD FORCE THE GOVERNMENT TO REVEAL IN DETAIL THE NATURE OF ITS SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION
ION
PROPOSAL AT LEAST 90 DAYS BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF THE REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN.

4. COMMENT: WHILE THE OPPOSITION WAS CAREFUL TO SPECIFY THAT IT HAD NO INTENTION OF MOUNTING A FILIBUSTER AND THAT IT IN FACT DESIRED EARLY ENACTMENT OF THE REFERENDUM LEGISLATION, THE EFFECT OF THE AMENDMENTS TABLED THIS WEEK WILL BE TO MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE PQ TO ACHIEVE ITS OBJECTIVE OF PASSING THE BILL BEFORE THE SUMMER BREAK, UNLESS IT INVOKES CLOTURE. THE COMMITTEE HAS, AS OF YESTERDAY, PASSED ONLY FIVE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 QUEBEC 00199 091938Z

OF THE BILL'S 117 CLAUSES IN CLAUSE BY CLAUSE DEBATE, AND THE SESSION ENDS JUNE 23. AS FOR THE AMENDMENT OBLIGING THE GOVERNMENT TO DEFINE ITS SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION PROPOSAL WELL IN ADVANCE OF THE CAMPAIGN, IT WOULD SIMPLY HAVE THE EFFECT OF FORCING THE GOVERNMENT BY LAW TO DO SOMETHING THAT RENE LEVESQUE HAS ALWAYS PROMISED TO DO ANYWAY.
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*** Current Classification *** LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AMENDMENTS, LEGISLATIVE BILLS, REFERENDUMS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978QUEBEC00199
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: n/a
Errors: n/a
Expiration:
Film Number: D780242-0322
Format: TEL
From: QUEBEC
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197806111/aaaafmom.tel
Line Count: 107
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON MICROFILM, TEXT ON-LINE
Message ID: a2254f7e-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2174776
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> srp 970822
Subject: AMENDMENTS PROPOSED TO REFERENDUM LEGISLATION
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, CA
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/a2254f7e-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014